

Linking participatory action research, global education, and social justice: Emerging issues from practice

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Abstract

This article focuses on the practical, ontological, and epistemological similarities and differences between global education and participatory action research (PAR). The paper starts by presenting classical definitions of action research, highlighting their similarities with the ideas of global education. Considering the aim of global education is to promote social justice and to improve the social and educational chances of groups at risk of marginalization, participatory methods can help to involve such groups in research in an ethical and effective way. The paper ends with two examples in formal and non-formal education that show that PAR can be used to address the underlying transformative and social action principles of global education, but the principles must be adjusted to meet the needs of the participants and the context.

Keywords: participatory action research, global education, social justice, asylum-seeking children, capabilities

Introduction

A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful for people in the everyday conduct of their lives. In educational contexts, this often means that practitioners are helped to improve their day-to-day educational practices so that the decided goals are attained. The wider purpose of action research

is to combine practical knowledge with theoretical considerations to bring about the increased well-being of human persons and communities, which would hopefully lead to a more equal and just world (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 2). For educators committed to the principles of global education, this would involve a modification of their daily practices to prepare children and young people to live in a global society. Thus, most action research projects start from the question ‘how can we improve this situation?’ and encourage researchers guided by personal commitments and values to contribute to social change. The question of how to improve one’s situation seems to be at heart of global education too, if we look at the argument by Scheunpflug and Asbrand (2006: 35) who note that global education is a ‘pedagogical reaction to the developmental stage of the world society’ and is continually aiming towards a change for the better.

This article considers the parallels and contradictions of participatory action research (hereafter PAR) as a pedagogical approach to promote global education and social justice, and argues that PAR is a methodology that can be used to achieve those goals. After describing the central features of PAR and global education, the paper moves on to highlight the philosophical, practical, ontological, and epistemological connections of these approaches with the idea of social justice, arguing that PAR, global education, and social justice are three elements forming the three sides of a triangular approach. The connection is elaborated in examples from two research projects, in formal and non-formal education respectively, which suggest that the PAR approach can begin to address the underlying transformative and social action principles (as proposed by Banks, 1989) of global education.

The paper concludes by outlining an agenda for further research into what is an increasingly significant aspect of education and schooling.

Action research: The first leg of the triangle

One suggestion for the origins of action research traces it back to Aristotle’s notions of *enérgeia* (activity) and *empeiría* (experience) in knowledge production, as well as the division of knowledge into *theoría* (theoretical knowledge), *poiêsis* (knowing how to make or produce), and *praxis* (practical knowledge), all of which are guided by a moral disposition to act truly and justly (*phronesis*) (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Dunne, 1993). More recent historical references regarding the origins of action research place emphasis on the work of John Dewey in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, Dewey argued that the origins of social injustice were to be found in ancient Greece and in the writings of Aristotle, where studying abstract liberal arts was the leisure of the privileged, while society’s subordinates had to study basic skills that were needed in labour (Dewey, 1939). Dewey’s concern about education’s role in reproducing society and all its inequities was later shared by, for example, Illich

(in *Deschooling Society*, 1971) and Postman and Weingartner (*Teaching as Subversive Activity*, 1970) and supported by critical scholars in Frankfurt (perhaps most notably by Jürgen Habermas), in Brazil (by Paulo Freire), and in France (by Michel Foucault). All these scholars furthered the emergence of critical pedagogy (Darder *et al.*, 2009), which is often used as a theoretical framework for action research. Although Dewey did not use the term 'action research', he argued that education and learning should be focused on solving meaningful problems in a collaborative manner, following reflective phases of suggestion, intellectualization, hypothesizing, reasoning, and testing hypothesis in action (Dewey, 1939; Räsänen, 1994).

While giving due recognition to the thinking of Aristotle and Dewey, the merit for founding action research as a research methodology is most often given to Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist who was probably the first to use the term 'action research.' Like other scientists in the 1930s and 1940s, Lewin conducted research through experiments to prove his hypotheses on the issues being explored. Unlike other researchers of his time, he wanted to conduct the experiments in contact with people in their natural environments, rather than in a laboratory. He proposed a cyclic research process that involved the following stages: (1) identifying a general idea; (2) reconnoitring or finding facts; (3) planning; (4) taking first action steps; (5) evaluating; (6) amending the plan in the light of practice; and (7) taking a second action step. The aim of these steps was to make a lasting change in society (Lewin, 1948). Lewin thought that an approach to social science research where the scientist tried to remain detached and objective had not provided solutions to social problems such as poverty or racism. As a result, Lewin took a different approach and embraced the notion of the impact upon the research of the researcher's position and values. Lewis argued that researchers inevitably influenced the research process through their interventions and that, by acknowledging this, researchers could push the action into a direction that would help solve the problem.

The approach that Lewin developed was essentially technical, and was oriented towards functional improvement which can be measured in terms of its success in changing outcomes or practices. Action researchers after him, inspired by Habermas (1987), have modified the knowledge interests of action research to also encompass *practical* knowledge interest, which has technical aspirations for change but also aims to inform the practical decision-making of practitioners. Another key element of action research identified by Habermas (1987) was emancipatory knowledge interest, which aims not only to improve outcomes, but also to help participants to be self-critical of their actions and to free themselves from oppressive structures (Kemmis, 2001).

Participatory action research

The PAR approach has increasingly been seen as a means to illuminate, foreground, and act upon issues and problems related to struggles for social justice, which pose questions about power relations and oppression while focusing on the self-empowerment of the people in the face of subjugation (Bargal, 2008). Such an approach reflects the view that ‘the point about PAR methodology is not solely to advance analytical or theoretical understanding, but to serve as an impetus toward greater social justice’ (O’Neill *et al.*, 2005: 86). It has been prevalent in development studies since the 1970s and has since become a central aspect of work in areas such as community development. The central premise of PAR ‘involves bringing people from various social and political contexts and backgrounds to identify, investigate and take appropriate action on conditions that affect them as community members’ (Duraiappah *et al.*, 2005: 16). This view is emphasized by Booth (2011: 2), who argued in favour of ‘... the more genuinely universal experience that institutions work better when they build on what exists, make use of indigenous institutional creativity or are otherwise rooted in their sociocultural context.’ As such, this mode of operation seeks to encourage and empower those facing a specific and problematic situation to develop strategies for gathering data on the issue in order to consider and examine ways in which they might act either to improve the situation they face or to make it more manageable. Thus, this approach deliberately reacts against the top-down approach to research that had been fostered in the past by many development agencies, and embraces notions of what Chambers (2010: 3) has called ‘adaptive pluralism’, which ‘...underpins and expresses ideas and practices of reflexivity, continuous learning, value and principle-based eclectic improvisation, co-evolution and continuous emergence.’ Thus, there appears to be a strong relationship between such an approach, identified as ‘going with the grain’ (Kelsall, 2008), and the kinds of reflective, locally based action research found within the PAR model.

Global education: The second leg of the triangle

The emphasis on reflective learning connected to locally based action can be found in many definitions of global education. The Maastricht Global Education Declaration, which came out of an international conference of policy-makers and practitioners organized by the Council of Europe in 2002, defines global education as:

[e]ducation that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of great justice, equity and human rights for all. Global education is understood to encompass Development Education, Human Rights Education, Education for Sustainability, Education for Peace and Conflict Prevention and Intercultural Education, being the Global Dimensions of Education for Citizenship.

Maastricht Global Education Declaration, 2002: 66

Räsänen (2011) has explored the above-mentioned dimensions in education for global citizenship, adding inclusive education to the Maastricht Declaration definition. This model has many parallels with common definitions of global education but places ethics in the centre of the diagram. What is significant in Räsänen's model is that she adds blank sectors that can vary greatly in their content but are nevertheless as important as the commonly agreed dimensions. The blank sectors are sensitive to the diversity in the contexts and the needs of the local people, but the ethical principles in the centre also require that these context-specific sectors be commensurable with the commonly agreed dimensions, such as the importance of inclusion and social justice. All action connected to these dimensions happens in and influences both local and global contexts, which highlights the personal stance both the educators and learners have in this process, and how all participants' values influence the process (see Figure 1 below).

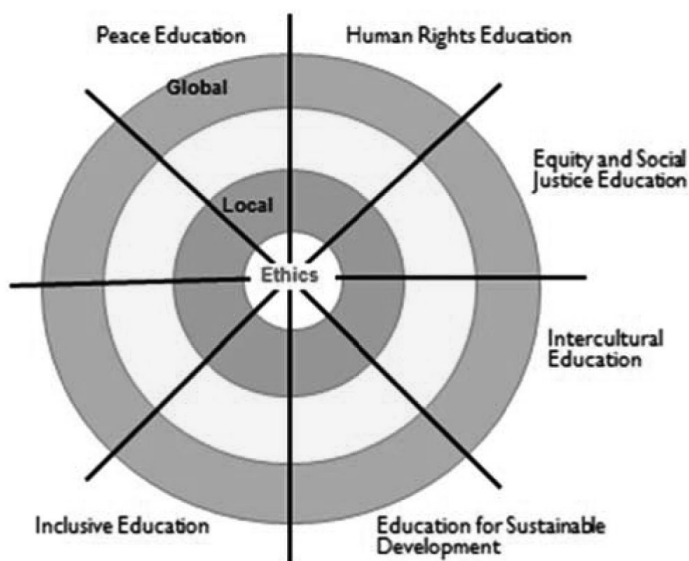


Figure 1: Education for Global Citizenship. Reproduced with the author's permission from Räsänen, 2011: 53

Along the same line, Scheunpflug (2011) notes that global learning should be a guiding principle defined by thematic issues such as development, environment, peace, and interculturalism, but also by spatial dimensions and by competencies that need to be acquired to live in a global society. The Maastricht Declaration includes many poetic descriptions of the change that is needed, such as the one

quoted above, but importantly also emphasizes the participatory methodology. The Maastricht Declaration states:

The methodology of Global Education focuses on supporting active learning and encouraging reflection with active participation of learners and educators. It celebrates and promotes diversity and respect for others and encourages learners to make their choices in their own context in relation to the global context. (emphasis ours)

Maastricht Global Education Declaration, 2002: 67

Core methods of global education

One way of considering the methods of global education is presented in the four approaches by Banks (1989), which were designed for curriculum reform, but as Banks noted himself in 2004, should go further: the approaches also illuminate the changes that are required in the attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, goals, norms, and cultures of the teachers and the school (Banks, 2004; Bennett, 2001). The approaches are the following:

1. The contributions approach
2. The additive approach
3. The transformation approach
4. The social action approach

Considering the approaches in global education, the contributions approach would touch the surface of global education, by for example introducing heroes and heroines, special holidays, and celebrations on special days or weeks of the school year, while the everyday school work remains unchanged. The additive approach adds a little more content to the curriculum, for example, a book or a course dealing with global issues. The third approach goes a lot further; it aims to enable students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several perspectives and points of view. The fourth, largely unreached approach adds components that require students to make decisions and to take action related to the concept, issue, or problem they study. According to Banks (2004), this social action approach is the most desired goal when teaching about knowledge construction. Therefore, the changes in the attitudes and behaviours are aimed at the third and fourth approach, whereas the first and second may be limited to curriculum reform, for which the approaches were originally planned. This division is still valid and applicable to global education as well; Guichun Zong (2015) writes that while some global educators call for critical social justice to address the challenges and realities of the new global era, many merely call for an expanded curricular scope to teach about the world and globalization.

Social justice: The third leg of the triangle

We argue that the idea of social justice is necessary to clarify the connection between PAR and global education. The concept of social justice is one that is closely contested. Nelson *et al.* (2012: 3) claim that there ‘appears no single definition of social justice’. Yet there seems to be some consensus about social justice being associated with human rights, fairness, and equity (Bates, 2007). This flows directly from the ideas expressed by the two prominent Enlightenment philosophers Kant and Rousseau. Furthermore, Singh (2011: 482) finds that social justice is related to finding out what is ‘beneficial and valued’ for the people in question.

A key element, as noted by Gewirtz (1998), suggests that social justice implies eradicating procedures that enhance marginalization and exclusion. Fraser (2007: 20, 25) has further identified this as central, in arguing for a ‘parity of participation ... participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction’ and has put forward ‘... the “all-affected principle”... [which] holds that all those affected by a given social structure or institution have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it’. This notion of addressing the marginalization of individuals or groups is further discussed by Theoharis (2007) and by Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002: 162), who argue that social justice is ‘the exercise of altering these [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational and personal dimensions’.

Social justice and action research

Looking at Lewin’s (1947) early description of the process of action research with the knowledge interests that often guide the process (Kemmis, 2001) on the one side, Banks’s (1989) four approaches on the other, and the idea of social justice on the third, it is easy to see how they complement each other. Lewin suggests that social research most often starts from planning, which is influenced by a general idea of something that seems desirable in a certain context. Most of us agree that social justice is a desirable goal in any context, and global education could be the educational approach to aim for that. How to circumscribe this objective is not always so clear, as Lewin also anticipated. He proposed that the first step would be to examine the idea carefully. This requires reconsidering what is meant by social justice (or any other goal that seems suitable): who defines it, in what context, and for whom? Considering the approaches by Banks, it would be clear that the first two do not include elements of social justice, but they could be necessary in the initial phase of examining the idea and acquiring knowledge about it. The next step would be to make an overall plan of how to reach the objective and thirdly, a decision in regard to the needed steps for action. The overall plan in this case would be an educational

approach with the underlying principles of social justice, and the necessary steps would be to design and implement the action to reach the objective.

Epistemologically and ontologically, PAR and global education are clearly commensurable. The starting point in both is to challenge our understanding of knowledge construction, which links to the debate about the purpose of education in this globalizing world (Marshall, 2007). It is maintained in most participatory approaches of action research and in global education that knowledge is both subjective and objective, and that its subjective components must be clearly identified (e.g. Reason and Torbert, 2001; Banks, 2004). Knowledge is seen as historically and socially constructed, which means that educators and researchers must explore the origins and the implicit assumptions in the concepts they use (Andreotti, 2011b). An approach which makes use of PAR would also contribute to the development of what Langdon and Larweh (2015: 281) have termed a 'knowledge democracy' and the stabilization of a more inclusive dimension within a global development agenda.

Both action research and global education have similarities with critical theories, such as feminist, post-colonial, post-structural, and critical race theories (Wicks *et al.*, 2008). A difference between PAR and critical theories or other critical research methods is the emphasis on change; advocates of participatory approaches argue that critical analysis without reflection and action may lead nowhere and that post-structural and some of the most extreme critical theorists have in fact 'given up political struggle' (McNay, 1994: 5) by limiting themselves to 'cold and cynical' theorizing (Kemmis, 2001). For this reason, many authors (such as Lather, 1991) maintain that the question of action remains under-addressed within postmodern and post-structural discourses, in which many global education theories are framed. Reason and Bradbury (2001: 6) note that this kind of theorizing can lead to a circle around various forms of relativist constructions: any sense of a world in which we are grounded eventually disappears. However, Carr and Kemmis (1986: 33) write that transforming theories into action is possible through dialectical thinking; even theories without action can help to describe as well as 'unmask' structures of oppression, and the practical change is possible when this knowledge is processed through dialectical thinking, leading to *phronesis* and *praxis* (Dunne, 1993).

What separates global education and PAR practically is the context: global education urges us to view our position within the larger context, considering the global implications of our actions. Global context may not be central in action research, but social justice can be aimed at personal, institutional, or other local levels. On the other hand, the participatory approach is not present in many definitions of global education; education can still be a rather top-down, authoritarian, adult-designed process. For example, the definition process of the Maastricht Declaration did not include the voices of children, but only those of European adult professionals.

Contrasting action research and theories of global education in practice and theory does not suggest that elements of action or participation are omitted in theories of global education. For example, Andreotti discusses global education within post-colonial, de-colonial, and post-structural theoretical frameworks; although, as mentioned above, these approaches might pose challenges in including action into theory, Andreotti (2011a) has introduced *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*, in which she analyses in some depth the conditions for a successful relation between reflection and action. For instance, Andreotti claims that the discourse of the poor and helpless Other who is in need of help is common but is insufficient, as it rarely includes deep reflection on the historical and political roots of problems. Thus, the discussion of active global citizenship and the need to be caring and compassionate can be paternalistic and exploitative. This notion is connected to her earlier discussion of soft vs. critical global (citizenship) education (Andreotti, 2006). Jokikokko (2005) identifies four dimensions of teachers' intercultural competence, and here action also plays a central role. As Jokikokko (2005) notes, it is not enough to be aware of inequalities; educators' competences require that they are ready to actively combat injustices within and beyond school settings. Jokikokko (forthcoming) highlights the connection of attitudes, skills, knowledge/awareness, and actions, later adding more emphasis on feeling in the process. Furthermore, Bourn (2015) calls for a more radical direction for global education; power, inequality, social justice, and critical reflection should be at the centre of all global learning.

In the last part of the article we present two examples from empirical research where the ideas of PAR and global education have been combined to form praxis for action that encompasses an awareness of, and attempts to deal with, emergent issues of social justice. The first example draws upon a study that aimed to develop an increased sensitivity and awareness of the leadership capabilities of primary school head teachers in Ghana to bring about changes that would impact upon social justice. The second example is a PAR with unaccompanied asylum-seeking girls in Finland, aiming to develop meaningful activities for the girls' free time at a reception centre where they lived and to promote children's participation; this is effective and relevant in the situation of asylum-seeking children while also being child-centred and sensitive to differences.

PAR and social justice

One of the authors was involved in the Leadership and Management (L&M) focus of the Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries (EdQual, 2005–2010) research programme consortium. The focus of EdQual was on seeking ways to improve the quality of school and classroom processes in low-income countries in Africa and, in particular, on developing activities and interventions that would have positive impacts upon the ability of young people to learn. The project involved cooperative

working between two higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (the University of Bristol and the University of Bath) and a group of universities located in Africa. A core concern was that leadership of individual themes was located within the African universities. A key driver was a desire to examine and analyse a range of classroom practices and learning activities that flowed from the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) concerns related to education, a desire governed by a wish to look beyond the understandable MDG focus on access and enrolment to look at pedagogical practices and their impacts upon pupil learning. Underpinning the work of the EdQual Project was a desire to examine these issues in the light of questions of social justice (Bosu *et al.*, 2011; Fraser, 1995).

PAR and school leadership

At the heart of the EdQual Project was the use of a PAR approach, which reflected a view of participation ‘... in which the people studied, or the intended beneficiaries of the research, have a substantial control over and participation in the research’ (Cancian, 1993: 94). Symbolically, the project leadership within EdQual was located within in-country universities. In addition, and reflecting an approach that focused upon PAR, the precise focus within the L&M element was upon the role of primary school head teachers in both Ghana and Tanzania, since they were seen to be best placed to identify concrete problems and issues of concern that impacted upon the learning potential of the pupils in their schools. Hence, the L&M initiative travelled on a twin-track: the development of the head teachers as ‘leaders of learning’ and, through their interventions in their individual schools, the development and learning capacities of their pupils (Avidov-Ungar *et al.*, 2014; Caudle *et al.*, 2014; Crafton, 2015; Ioannidou-Koutselini and Patsalidou, 2015). At the heart of the endeavour was the encouragement to ‘make the decision to move beyond normalized, safe practice’ (Bristol and Ponte, 2013: 526). The school leaders took the opportunity to initiate actions that would provide an environment within which pupils could move from ‘capability’ to ‘functioning’ in areas such as language ability and mathematics, an approach that links to Nussbaum’s (2011: 33) view of a central capability of:

senses, imagination, and thought [which emerges through] being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a ‘truly human’ way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training.

Developments along the head teacher track focused upon the growing emergence of a clear sense of agency among the school leaders, enabling them to use the PAR process as a vector for the conversion of their embedded leadership capabilities into leadership functionings and as a way of promoting social justice within their school communities.

A central concern was the role of these primary school head teachers within their communities and the ways in which, through their involvement and participation in the PAR process, they could enhance the learning opportunities for the pupils within their schools. Through the use of the Capabilities Approach as a framework within which to examine the actions of these primary school leaders, it was possible to seek to address the apparent tensions between the freedom and agency of school pupils to make choices about their day-to-day activities, focused upon what they have reason to value on the one hand and environments and contexts for learning that are essentially fashioned by adults on the other. The initiatives by these primary school head teachers in Ghana and Tanzania provided opportunities for such a focus (Bosu *et al.*, 2011; Fertig, 2012) and indicated the potential strengths of a *mélange* between PAR, social justice, and the desire to foster a greater involvement of individuals and communities in the development of pupil learning capabilities as global citizens.

Developing school leaders as action researchers

In Ghana, a group of 21 school leaders attended a workshop in February 2008, where they were introduced into the use of PAR techniques by facilitators from the United Kingdom and from Ghana. The aim of the workshops was to empower the head teachers to use these techniques so that their practice of leadership would enhance their capacity to improve pupil achievement through the translation of their own embedded leadership capabilities into identifiable activities, which would provide the opportunity for pupil capabilities to be transformed into identifiable learning and functionings. The intention was to identify good practices from the head teachers' PAR interventions that could provide insights into leading and managing change to enrich educational quality within their schools. In this sense, the head teachers were encouraged to focus on issues or concerns that directly impacted upon the quality of pupil achievement within their schools and to examine these through a social justice lens. Given the nature of the head teacher contract of employment in Ghana where, as Essuman and Akyeampong (2011: 519) have noted, teachers and head teachers 'saw themselves primarily as "contracted" to teach through a posting system controlled and managed at the national level', they felt themselves to be in the position of civil servants carrying out government policy. This, allied to a national policy context in Ghana that laid great stress upon the accountability of school leaders, meant that the immediate response of the vast majority of the head teacher group was one of scepticism (Batagiannis, 2011; Carson, 1990; Pitman, 2012). A key factor that encouraged a more positive view was the work done with regional officials and national policy-makers in persuading these key stakeholders to allow this group of school leaders to work in ways that deviated from national prescriptions for head teacher activity and the strict guidelines of a voluminous Head Teacher Manual. This was an important aspect in the process of moving

from what Walker (2006: 165) has called ‘an opportunity to achieve and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome.’

Once all of the participating head teachers had embarked on the trajectory identified by Walker (2006), they focused on their specific issue of concern and started to build up a picture of the approach that they intended to use. A key element was the direct and ongoing support offered by facilitators and critical friends located in the higher education institution in Ghana. The network of close relationships and social capital built up over many years was seen as a vital ingredient in both maintaining research momentum and in emphasizing the South–South nature of the research collaboration. All the participating head teachers were asked to keep a log of their actions in relation to their chosen issue or concern and, also, to develop data-gathering instruments that would provide them with evidence of any resultant changes in their own and their pupils’ capabilities emerging from their actions. Contact was maintained between project school leaders and their respective facilitators.

PAR and schooling

An illustration of the kinds of issues that the school leaders focused upon, and the ways in which they made use of a PAR approach, can be seen through the exploration of School A. It is the only public basic school in its area, and serves three communities. The literacy rate of the communities is generally low and most of the people have low incomes. A key issue of concern for the head teacher was the high incidence of teenage pregnancy that caused girls to drop out of school before completing the cycle of schooling. This concern with pregnancy as a factor in female dropout from school was significant and can be seen as an example of what Ananga (2011: 378) has called ‘event dropout’. As girls are generally less likely to obtain a higher level of education due to social and cultural issues, a critical issue for the head teacher was that girls who are in school are encouraged and assisted to go as far as they can. Girls who are educated tend to marry later, raise fewer children who are healthier, and support education for their children – all of which contribute to alleviating extreme poverty (Akyeampong, 2009; Annin, 2009; Chimombo, 2009; Tembon and Fort, 2008).

The head teacher of the school focused attention on the importance of sending girls to school and was looking to address the problem of pregnancy that hindered girls’ education, as more often than not they are unable to go back to school after childbirth. The head teacher was also concerned about the impact that this was having upon the reading skills of girls in the lower primary classes. In the case of teenage pregnancy, the head teacher’s strategy was to use the cooperation of the parents and the community to address the problem. This strategy bore close alignment to notions of ‘recognition’ (Fraser, 1997; 1995) and cast doubt on ideas of young children’s

personal autonomy and choice (Biggeri *et al.*, 2010; Clark and Eisenhuth, 2010). The success of the strategy of gaining community support contrasted with the lack of community consensus-building found in other studies of rural schools in Ghana (Essuman and Akyeampong, 2011). It is also clear here that the head teacher was acting as a 'moral agent' in the sense indicated by Schrag (1979), in seeking to gather together significant information from key parties who were likely to be affected by decisions taken within the school. Thus, a parent-teacher association (PTA) meeting was organized to discuss the problem and come up with possible solutions. At the meeting it was agreed that the parents should monitor their children closely. It was also agreed that the PTA would meet with the chief and elders of the community in order to develop a set of bye-laws that would serve as a deterrent. These focused on introducing stringent measures that would be imposed on men who had had sexual relations with teenage girls that had resulted in pregnancy. In addition, male and female teenagers were banned from going to night clubs within the community.

A second strategy within this concern about teenage pregnancy, which further enhanced the notion of 'recognition', was to invite counsellors and women who could serve as role models to the school periodically to give talks to the pupils on issues such as the importance of education, the adverse effects of teenage pregnancies, and the specifics of sex education. The counselling of pupils and the involvement of the parents and community appear to have improved the situation of teenage pregnancy. The head teacher reported that in the 2007/08 academic year there were five cases of pregnancies in the Junior High School. However, no pregnancy has been reported in 2008/09. The head teacher attributed this to the stringent rules made by the chief and the continuous counselling that was carried on in the school.

The in-service training and increased frequency of supervision had some impact on the academic performance of the pupils in lower primary. Overall, the boys performed better than the girls in reading and core subjects in all the three classes before the intervention. For example, average scores for Reading Skills in Class 2 were 42 per cent for boys and 40 per cent for girls. After the intervention, the girls generally performed slightly better than the boys, especially in Reading Skills, with average scores in Class 3 being 71 per cent for girls and 59 per cent for boys.

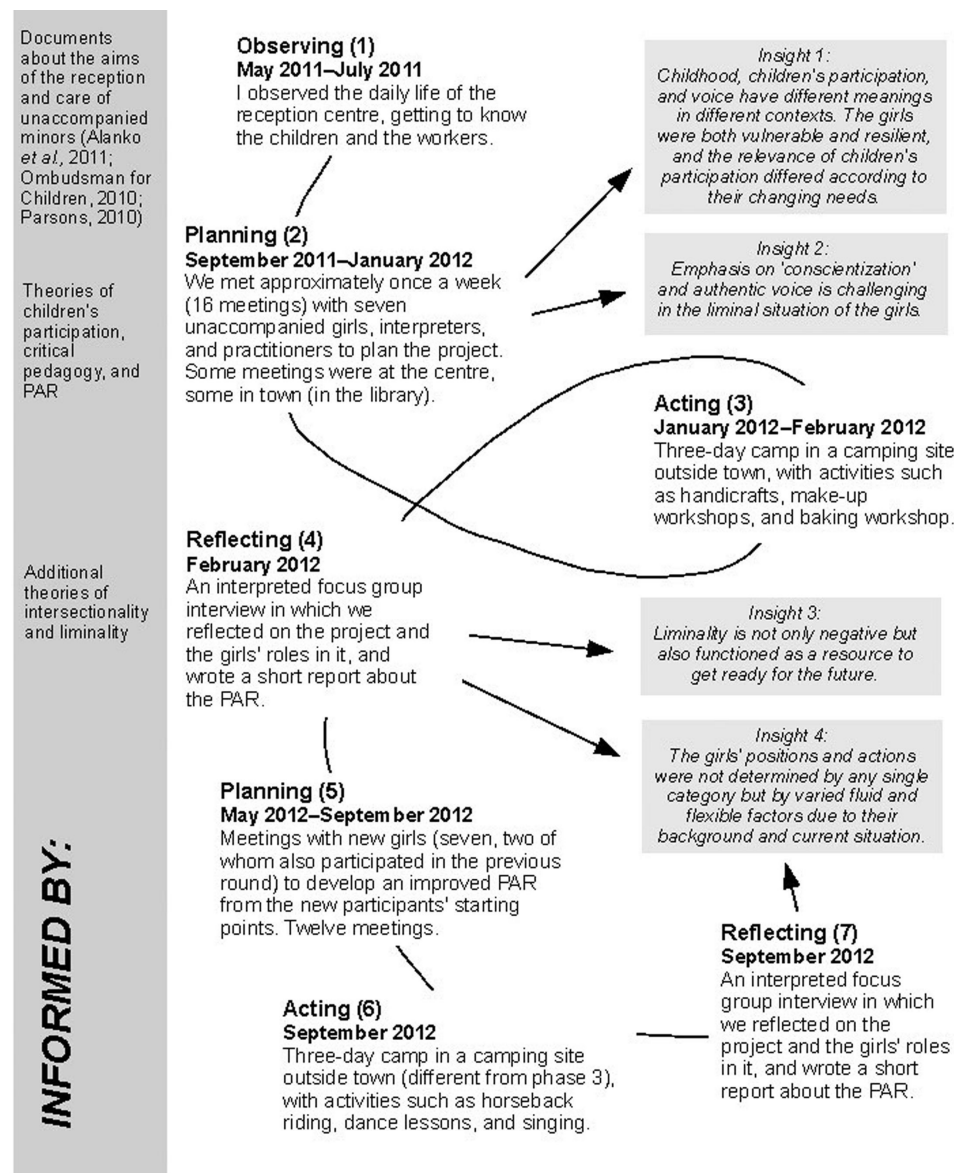
The role of the head teacher in this series of episodes had changed significantly from that of a functionary performing bureaucratic demands to one where the 'capability' of acting as a broker across different community stakeholders had been converted into a 'functioning', which had displayed an 'understanding [of] the social embeddedness and contextualized nature of individual capabilities' (Tikly and Barrett, 2011: 8) and the relevance of leadership for social justice.

PAR and asylum-seeking girls

The second study was conducted by one of the authors as a PAR involving 12 unaccompanied asylum-seeking girls between the ages of 8 and 17 who waited for their asylum decision in a Finnish reception centre; 9 of the 12 practitioners who worked there were also interviewed. The PAR had two rounds of action between May 2011 and December 2012 with 12 unaccompanied girls (8–17 years of age), from Somalia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the help of 12 practitioners. The research aimed at answering the following questions:

1. How do the unaccompanied asylum-seeking girls view participation, its relevance and possibilities during their asylum period?
2. How to use PAR in institutions of residential care, such as the reception centre, to promote children's participation in a culturally and gender-sensitive way?

The study was mostly conducted at the reception centre, which was the girls' temporary home as well as a non-formal educational setting; the role of the adults in the centre was to provide the girls with care, support, and help with their upbringing. Children's participation was chosen as a focus of the research because previous research shows that supporting children's participation can help them in a process of reconstructing healthy identities, learning about their own capacities and possibilities, regaining trust in the surrounding people, and beginning to create a sense of belonging in a challenging situation (Feinstein *et al.*, 2010; Hart, 2008; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Promoting the participation of vulnerable children, such as those coming from areas of war and conflict, is important but challenging: research shows that implementing the CRC, especially the right to participate, is challenging in Finland (Alanko *et al.*, 2011) and elsewhere (Bhabha and Schmidt, 2006; Halvorsen, 2005; Shamseldin, 2012; Lidén and Rusten, 2007). As human rights, including children's rights, are central to social justice and equality, it is clear that children's participation fits well within the triangle of PAR, global education, and social justice. The main insights of the project highlight Räsänen's (2011) notion of the context- and participant-sensitive approach, which is crucial in all global education: the notion of social justice in a certain context cannot be explained solely by the participants' asylum-seeking status, vulnerability, or resilience, or the seemingly challenging life-conditions of the participants; the lives of the girls in this study were complex and varying, and thus, relevant participation was multidimensional and fluid. Theoretical knowledge on the participants, context, and PAR can and should inform the process, but experiential knowledge created in interaction with participants must lead the process, sometimes in unexpected directions. For instance, the girls in this study did not see themselves as victims of their position or view their current phase as needing transformation, as can be seen in the picture below (reproduced from Kaukko, 2015):



Social justice and participation

The project illuminated that while social justice and the ideals of global education are admirable goals, they are also highly context-tied ideas, and no one way of promoting social justice through children's participation is applicable across different contexts and with different participants. It became clear that promoting

children's participation in a way that is meaningful, effective, and sensitive to differences (ethnicity, culture, gender etc.) required balancing the aims for lasting social change (Lewin, 1948), and emancipatory knowledge (Habermas, 1987) with the reality of the girls. Although all participating adults were committed to promoting the children's agency and participation and agreed that the children should learn about their reality to be able to transform it, the concepts of transformation or social action acquired a very different meaning in the case of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The transformation the girls were waiting for is in the future, when their independent, 'real' life starts in Finnish society; social action becomes possible when the girls acquire enough basic knowledge about their situation. Therefore, the current need was to make the situation more manageable rather than to aim for some grand transformation.

The girls in this study wanted the adults to be facilitators in ways that were most useful for them: to provide them with information about their situation and with basic facts about the Finnish society, including information about children's rights and responsibilities. This kind of education can be seen as the much criticized 'banking education', to use Freire's words (1968/2000), but it is also education for the basic competencies required for more advanced competencies, such as critical thinking or problem-solving skills. Similarly, the process resembles the girls' journey from basic capabilities to acquiring functionalities in the future. Basic competencies are usually provided by schools (Scheunpflug, 2011: 33), but as the girls had very little educational background from the countries of their origin, non-formal education provided by the reception centre had a central role in filling that gap. Thus, it was understandable that the girls wanted the adults to tell them what to do, what was right, and what was beneficial for the girls in the current situation. The burden of fighting social injustices or improving their present circumstances was rightly seen as being the professional adults' responsibility, while the girls wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to learn basic skills and to be cared for.

This is not to say that the girls did not see the possibility of social action and transformation as relevant for the future. The girls noted that being taught basic skills by the adults and being given more responsibilities as their capacities increased would help them in the future. Thus, the balance between the transformative goals of action research and the sensitivity to differences comes from a central principle of global education: the ability to look at situations from multiple points of view, trying to understand how the situation seems from another person's perspective. Doing this means that the researcher and the practitioners in this situation have to be open to disconcerting evidence and admit that perhaps the situation does not appear as disempowering or in need of transformation in the eyes of the children who experience it. Perhaps it is justifiable in this situation to take some of the responsibilities away

from the children, allowing them to be free from responsibility. In the case of our project, the improvement the girls saw as relevant was not transformative from the researchers' point of view. Rather, for the girls a transformative improvement was the management of their current situation by bringing ordinary elements of normality into their everyday lives; this they saw as elements of social justice and fairness at their local level.

Conclusion

Global education and action research share a strong value base of social justice, ethics, dialogue, and partnership (Räsänen, 2011; Manzo and Brightbill, 2010). Partnership can take place on many levels; global education emphasizes global partnerships that promote justice, whereas partnerships in action research can be limited to a more local level, but the partnership must be reciprocal and promote active participation of all partners. Therefore, it is fair to say that the difference between PAR and global education is 'more context than content, semantics than substance, and oratorical than essential,' as Guy (1983, quoted in Sleeter and McLaren, 1995) argued about multicultural education and critical pedagogy, a sentiment that applies equally well to global education and action research.

The examples from the field emphasize the point made by Rauni Räsänen (2011): what is equal, relevant, and just depends on the context, and the teacher or the facilitator must be sensitive to interpret the context. Halinen (2011) describes the role of the facilitator in global education using a sailing metaphor: we must know where we are right now, where we want to go, how to get there safely, and, very importantly, how to read and interpret the weather conditions. The head teacher project focused centrally upon participant identification of attainable goals in response to the contextual challenges faced by educators working in harsh and under-resourced environments. Relevant participation for the girls in study 2 was not transforming or challenging power relations; for them social justice at the local level was more significant. Understanding where the participants of both studies wanted to go while being sensitive to the weather conditions influencing the journey required the facilitators to acknowledge that social justice is relative. Similarly, the view of action research located within this paper emphasizes the positional values of the researcher, the establishment of reasonable and manageable goals related to the social and political context, and the practical steps needed to achieve those goals.

The ideas of action research, or the transformation or social action approaches suggested by Banks (1989), do not automatically produce more equal relationships and distribute power more equally (Manzo and Brightbill, 2010). This may not even be necessary; sometimes, as in the case of children and adults, ethical relationships can be hierarchical. Focusing on trouble and the need to 'empower'

somebody can lead to further marginalization, and that assumption might silence the voices of participants, just like Andreotti's (2011a) *Actionable Postcolonial Theory* suggests. However, this is not to suggest that discussion of greater participation or empowerment is inevitably paternalistic or exploitative or that social change should be seen as impossible to achieve: the discussion can still bring light to the change that the participants see as necessary and help them to be active in the way in which they wish.

This article suggests that the roots and philosophical foundation of action research and global education have more similarities than differences; among others, they share a concern for social justice. Both global education and action research pose critiques of power relations and dominance and focus on individual self-empowerment and societal change. They also emphasize reflective thinking and an interest in the process as well as in the outcome. The purpose of looking at PAR and global education together is that active and participatory methods, together with the third and fourth approach by Banks (transformation or social action), could help education to succeed in 'strengthening solidarity, empowering active global citizens, through active and reflective educational practices' (Maastricht Global Education Declaration, 2002), as well as to promote social justice and intercultural understanding (Bourn, 2014; Räsänen, 2011). Considering the aim of global education to promote social justice and promote the social and educational chances of the groups at risk of marginalization, adopting participatory methods can be the only way of ethically involving people in research. Regardless of the context and the participants, the core principles of PAR, to do research *with* people rather than *on* them, helps to make research both ethical and sensitive to differences and can provide the impetus that will enable citizens to take action to understand and, ultimately, to improve their situation.

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